

FUNDACIÓN RAÚL y MENCA LEONI

**ARCHIVO RAÚL LEONI OTERO
HEMEROGRAFÍA
CARPETA D-217
(1953)**

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BACKGROUND: Virginia Prewett, 32 Gramercy Park, S., New York 3, NY

Present: Special inter-American affairs articles, Washington Daily News, Rocky Mountain News and 41 U.S. papers. Now completing Latin American assignment for the Reader's Digest.

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As a correspondent in Latin America for the Chicago Sun Syndicate in the 1940's, Virginia Prewett was syndicated in over 100 papers world-wide. Through the 1950's, she contributed to the Washington Post, New York Herald-Tribune and major magazines. Was Chairman, Inter-American Affairs Committee, OPC, 1953-1954; Executive Vice-Chairman, OPC Conference on News Knowledge and Freedom in the Americas, 1955.

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"Some day your own people will recognize the tremendous services that your informed and conscientious columns do."

"Beyond the Great Forest"



The only extant picture of the clearing of the fazenda with tenants houses. Situated 100 miles northeast of Anapolis in the Great Forest of Goiaz, that was (1950).

CHARLES A. GAULD, reviewing
Rio, July 1953

"BEYOND THE GREAT FOREST" (N. Y., Dutton, 1953) is the moving, intimate story of American newspaperwoman Virginia Prewett's attempt to find tranquility by opening a farm on the forested frontier in Goiaz. She sought a refuge from the atomic age after years of disillusionment in Buenos Aires with American diplomatic appeasement of Peron's mounting repression of all freedoms.

Virginia Prewett has been covering Latin America since 1941 for American newspapers. This is her third book. It is dedicated to her fellow postwar journalist in Buenos Aires, William Mizelle, now her husband. Their love story is beautifully told.

After Virginia, Bill and I had covered the Quitandinha conference on hemisphere defense in August 1947. Virginia bought land in Goiaz and I on the superbly scenic coast halfway to Santos. This is the account of her struggle until 1950 to develop a farm.

Goiaz's magnificent upland scenery at first exerted a mysterious influence on Miss Prewett. She was fascinated and then frightened by the bluish-lavender mountain ranges and valleys and the dense, verdant forests which lifted her soul like great music or the assurance of the steadfast love of Bill, whom she married on quitting Goiaz. She contrasts the magnificent panoramas with the misery of the brief, uncertain lives of the backlanders.

Anglo-Saxons who know Brazil will be intrigued by the author's description of "the unimaginable thicket of troubles, ignorance and difficulties" which hem in Goiaz lives. She brilliantly analyzes her typically exasperating experiences in trying to accomplish anything for herself in Goiaz or in the interlude when she was press officer in Rio of the International Refugee Organization, attempting to relocate some thousands of displaced Europeans with valuable skills and a desperate desire to commence their lives again.

Virginia Prewett shared this desire, hoping to achieve her own technical assistance program on the banks of the lovely Rio das Almas whose turbid waters sweep strongly northward to join the mighty Tocantins, roaring over boulder-toothed rapids to join the mysterious Amazon.

The writer tried on her own 500 acres to avoid the pitiless abuse of the soil which has characterized four centuries of Brazil's agricultural his-

tory. She had seen in São Paulo the once-famous purple earth "bare, baked, cracked and gullied" between millions of slowly dying coffee trees where soil-renewing crops should be planted before it is too late.

In Goiaz the author found Latin America's typical, tragic erosion of land and people thru ignorant, selfish "soil-mining." She found Goiaz sharing the desperate need of all Brazil for better seeds, methods, teachers — and leadership. Rio authorities failed to prevent the 1950 crash in rice prices which ruined countless farmers in Goiaz and was the final blow that led Virginia to return to the United States. She sold out to Dr. L. Job Lane Jr., director of São Paulo's excellent Hospital Samaritano and grandson of Dr. Horace Lane, famed longtime president of MacKenzie College.

Miss Prewett's Tennessee upbringing among Negro servants helped her



Mr. William R. Mizelle (Bill) of 7, Lexington Av. N.Y.C. formerly with the New York Times Bureau and Mc Graw-Hill in Buenos Aires. Author of many newspaper and magazine articles on Brazil and South America.

understand many elusive Brazilian characteristics (p. 164), including what she terms feminine traits in men. Other traits, defensive in the stagnant colonial centuries are today outmoded and harmful like passive non-compliance, resistance to hard



Showing the author sitting inside the overseer's mudwalled hut on the "Fazenda Chavante", settling the accounts of the last harvest.

work (as in Rio) and rejection of efficiency: She rebukes the ruling class.



Virginia Prewett, author of the famous book "Beyond the Great Forest". Dona Virginia Prewett is now Mrs. Bill Mizelle.

Ibero-America's medieval anti-feminist customs, according to the author, prevent Latin males, incessantly chasing women, from being faithful to a wife and from combining sacred and profane love in one woman. She sees the Latin, compulsively unfaithful, doomed to failure in true love.

Brazilian women are generally kept carefully imprisoned in the harem mentality," she writes, especially in inland towns. In Anápolis, Virginia found pathetic or angering cases of wives denied all freedom by husbands who were cruel philanderers and nightowls.

"Brazil has not solved the race problem entirely and most of her people, black and white, are much worse off materially than most of our (U. S.) Negroes," she asserts, noting that intermarriage is free only among the poor. She found that the darker the peasant the better he worked. Miss Prewett declares that Brazilians "boast of a strong African heritage." This reviewer in researching an article on race in Rio found educated Cariocas ashamed to admit any trace of African ancestry and denouncing their Portuguese ancestors for introducing millions of Negroes and mixing with them on a vast scale as described by Freyre.

An error common to many foreign writers is repeated by Miss Prewett in ascribing the frequency of light hair among children in Goiaz (and

Brazil) to the few thousand unmarried Dutch who in the 1630s and 1640s held Northeast Brazil. The Dutch never reached Goiaz. Such children are, even in the Nordeste according to Freyre, descended from prolific North Portuguese colonists of blond Celtic-Visigothic origin.

In Goiaz Miss Prewett found Communist agents of hate, revenge and social destruction. She wants the United States, which may soon have to bail Brazil out of its growing economic crisis, to create a realistic, democratic policy able to keep millions of South Americans from going Communist by encouraging democratic, efficient government as well as thru technical aid. Millions of landworkers like those who felled giant trees and burned off part of the "mato grosso de Goiaz" for Dona Virginia and planted rice and coffee hold in Brazil and Asia the precarious balance of power between the Atlantic Community and Soviet Imperialism.

Author Prewett colorfully describes the rape of Brazil's dwindling virgin areas by fire agriculture and erosion, with the resulting rootlessness of migratory millions all over the hungry, illiterate backlands which alarm geographers and rural sociologists like Preston James and Lynn Smith who have published books on Brazil. Miss Prewett rejects like such scholars Brazil's national myth, that this matters little since Brazil possesses unlimited resources and merely needs to move the federal district to Goiaz and enjoy a westward movement and assured future like the United States. Instead, Brazil may go the way of starving, overpopulated India or chaotic red China. Brazil is a poor country suicidally wasting soil, forests and human resources.

Washington officials who appease Peronism and incredibly have been refusing to bolster Brazil as a bulwark against totalitarianisms are branded by Miss Prewett as the betrayers of the Good Neighbors. Despite Washington's information program, Brazil is ignorant of the enormous, widespread benefits to the American people of dynamic U. S. democracy and capitalism. Brazil is the oyster of a rapacious, exorbitant-profit, tax-dodging, medieval capitalism, she warns.

A dense forest of non-comprehension separates North and South Americans, laments Miss Prewett. It is this forest which should beckon thousands of idealistic young university graduates, optimistic and full of disciplined energies. It is the new frontier.

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